



Public Affairs Office

CMS NEWS

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CERTAIN MILITARY BENEFICIARIES MAY NOT HAVE TO PAY LATE ENROLLMENT SURCHARGE FOR MEDICARE PART B PREMIUMS

Department of Defense, Social Security Administration and
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Join Forces To Identify Eligible Beneficiaries

Nearly 35,000 uniformed services Medicare beneficiaries who are eligible for TRICARE Health Benefits will be automatically enrolled in Medicare Part B without having to pay a surcharge for late enrollment. Also, those retired uniformed services Medicare beneficiaries who enrolled in Part B since 2001 and are paying more than \$66.60 per month will receive a refund for the premium surcharges paid since January 2004.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) will automatically enroll affected beneficiaries in Medicare Part B during the month of September 2004 without requiring the beneficiary to take any action. Those eligible beneficiaries who have paid a premium surcharge during 2004 will have that surcharge automatically refunded to them as well. Beneficiaries eligible for these special provisions were identified by the Department of Defense (DoD), SSA and Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS).

Eligible beneficiaries should receive two letters, one from DoD and one from SSA. The DoD letter emphasizes that those beneficiaries who are entitled to Medicare Part A based on age, disability or End Stage Renal Disease, must enroll in Medicare Part A and B to retain their TRICARE eligibility. The SSA letter tells beneficiaries that they have been enrolled in Medicare Part B effective September 2004, explains changes in their social security check and identifies their rights. Beneficiaries eligible for the surcharge waiver will receive a refund check and an explanation of changes in their Social Security retirement check.

William Winkenwerder, Jr., MD, MBA, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Health Affairs stated, "We welcome these new provisions and the assistance they provide for many of our military beneficiaries to retain their TRICARE benefits as a supplement to Medicare coverage. The help and cooperation from CMS and SSA have been excellent."

"The new Medicare law protects thousands of military retirees from having to make higher payments to enroll in Medicare Part B," said CMS Administrator Mark B. McClellan, M.D., Ph.D. "This will allow eligible military retirees to use their TRICARE benefits as a Medicare supplement."

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“Not only are we enrolling eligible beneficiaries in Part B effective September 1, but we’ll also make sure that those individuals who had been paying higher premiums get their refunds,” said Jo Anne Barnhart, Commissioner of Social Security. “Beneficiaries should receive notices regarding these actions by the end of October.”

The Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 included two provisions for those Medicare beneficiaries who are eligible for TRICARE, a health care coverage program for active duty and retired members of the uniformed services, their families and survivors. The law:

1. Eliminates the Medicare Part B surcharge for retired uniformed services beneficiaries who enrolled in Part B during the years 2001 to 2004. Medicare Part B premiums will be reduced for these beneficiaries to the regular monthly premium rate and beneficiaries will be reimbursed for any surcharges paid in 2004. These refunds will be provided in a separate Social Security check.
2. Allows retired uniformed services beneficiaries who are entitled to Medicare Part A but not enrolled in Medicare Part B to enroll in Part B without a premium surcharge. These beneficiaries will be automatically enrolled in Part B effective September 1, 2004, but most can change that date to any other month in 2004.

To remain eligible for TRICARE benefits, uniformed services beneficiaries also must be registered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS). Information may be updated in DEERS by visiting an identification card issuing facility. To find the nearest identification card issuing facility, beneficiaries may visit www.dmdc.osd.mil/rsl. Beneficiaries with questions or who require further assistance regarding DEERS may contact the Defense Manpower Data Center Support Office (DSO) Telephone Center at (800) 538-9552 (TTY/TDD 1-800-363-2883 for the hearing impaired).

For general information about TRICARE benefits, beneficiaries may call the TRICARE Information Service at 1-888-363-5433, contact the health benefits advisor at their nearest military medical facility, or visit the TRICARE Web site at www.tricare.osd.mil. Additional information regarding these benefits under the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 (P.L. 108-173) is available <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/legislation/tricarefact.html>.

Beneficiaries who think they may be affected by the new law who do not receive a notice by November 1st should contact their local Social Security Office. If beneficiaries have questions about enrolling in Medicare Part B, they may call SSA toll free, at 1-800-772-1213 or visit any Social Security office. Beneficiaries may also contact Medicare at 1-800-MEDICARE or www.medicare.gov for additional information.

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